

Developing a Scale of Children's Intercultural Competence:

Issues and Challenges

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Keywords

Intercultural competence, Primary school children, Measurement instrument

Introduction

The concept of “intercultural competence (ICC)” has been considered an essential attribute for cultivating global citizenship. While there exist a number of instruments to measure ICC for adults, there has not been any prior development of such instruments for school aged children. This study is a preliminary report of a research project supported by three year-long grant by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. While the final objectives of the research project is to develop a valid scale to measure ICC of children, this study attempts to summarize the issues emerged in the initial stage of such scale development process. Particularly, the research examines the applicability of Byram's (1997) theory of intercultural communicative competence in developing the scale for children's intercultural competency. It also discusses the issues related to acceptable reliability and validity in designing the questionnaire.

Description of the research project

The overarching goal of the present research is to understand the longitudinal trend in the development of intercultural competence through second language (L2) acquisition among children in primary schools. L2 education of children has received growing attention around the world as a tool to promote not only linguistic competence but also the development of intercultural competence, an essential attribute for global citizenship (Ashwill & Oanh, 2009; Russo & Osborne, 2004). While studies support a positive effect of early introduction of L2 education on proficiency of the language skills, researchers that has demonstrated its effect on a child's development of intercultural competence is scarce. In order to know the effectiveness of L2 education on intercultural competence of children, an appropriate objective measurement is needed. While there exists instruments to measure intercultural competence for adults, our literature review did not reveal any prior development of such instrument for

children. Thus, the current study has two objectives;

Objective 1: Identify indicators of intercultural competency in primary school context which are measurable by the self-reporting of children.

Objective 2: Provide score reliability and validity evidence to support the use of the instrument.

The research is innovative because: 1) it focuses on intercultural competence of children, and 2) longitudinal change in intercultural competence will be examined with the children's self-report assessment. The present study is the first step of the Objective 1 which aims to identify a valid self-reporting method to measure intercultural competence of children that can be used to monitor its development over time.

A brief summary of relevant literature

Researchers of intercultural competence throughout the past few decades have not agreed on the term to express the concept of intercultural competence. While scholars have labeled this concept differently (Deardorff, 2008), we choose “intercultural competence” for the proposed study as this term appears to be most commonly used in the recent literature. As there are a variety of terms to express intercultural competence, the definitions as to what consists of such competence also varies in the literature and the concept has evolved over time (Sercu, 2004). However, despite the complex nature of identifying intercultural competence, our review revealed that the four features have emerged as common core components of intercultural competence: (1) motivation/attitudes; (2) knowledge; (3) skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures; and (4) cultural awareness (Arasarathnam, 2009; Bryam, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Damen, 1987; Paige, 1999). The description of these components will be detailed in the conceptual framework below.

Attempts to measure intercultural competence

One of the first instruments to measure intercultural competence dates back to 1925 when Bogardus developed the Social Distance Scale (Paige, 1999). This scale became a prototype of similar instruments in later studies (Cadd, 1994; Osgood & Suci, 1957; Seelye, 1994). In recent years, not only objective assessments, but also a variety of alternative assessment techniques has been developed to measure intercultural competence. These new assessment protocols incorporate intercultural episodes,

journaling, critical incidents, mini-dramas, or even videotaping of cultural role plays (King, 1990; Paige, 1999). Among several new objective assessments, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) developed by Hammer and Bennett (2003) has become one of the most popular instruments used in both practical and research settings because of its empirical validity and theoretical contributions (Paige, 2003).

Intercultural competence of children

While intercultural competence has received much attention in the past decade, most of the research literature has focused on adults, not children. Studies focused on intercultural competence of children are limited because of the assumption that the attainment of intercultural competence presumes a cognitive ability and morality that many young children have yet to acquire (Kramsch, 1993). On the other hand, there are several studies which argue that any subject can be taught effectively to children at any stage of development, and thus the issue of intercultural competence is relevant for the youngest of children (Bryam & Doye, 1999). Based on this assumption, a qualitative study was conducted recently by a European research consortium to identify indicators of intercultural competence of preschoolers using qualitative and ethnographic observation technique (ELIAS, 2008). The findings of this exploratory study suggests that it is an ideal time to extend our knowledge for understanding how preschool children develop intercultural competence over time.

In sum, a review of relevant literature highlights the need for a valid quantitative tool to measure primary school children's intercultural competence. Therefore, as the first phase of this longitudinal research, the current study tries to identify indicators of intercultural competence in primary school children measured by self-reporting. The first phase of this research also includes steps to validate the instrument.

Conceptual framework

The study employs Bryam's (1997) framework of intercultural competence as our conceptual framework which is supplemented by the studies of Bennett (1993) and Sercu (2004) whose works share common conceptual assumptions regarding what elements consist of intercultural competence. Table 1 provides the four dimensions of intercultural competence discussed by these researchers.

Table 1.

Construct Definition of Intercultural Competence

Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity and openness • Positive disposition towards learning • A willingness to accept the other person's perspective as normal an one's own as strange, when seen from the other's perspective
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture-specific and culture-general knowledge • Of different social groups in one's own society and that of one's foreign interlocutor, • Of their cultural practices and products and of the social processes involved when people of different groups or different societies meet and interact
Skills	<p><i>Skills of interpreting:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to use knowledge of one's own and the other society to interpret a foreign text or any other kind of document in ways which explain it in one's own society <p><i>Skills of discovery and interaction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to acquire new knowledge about one's interlocutor and to interact with them under real time pressures
Cultural Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries

Source: Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*.

Methods

This study employed a mixed methods approach using both the focus group interview and the pilot survey at our collaborating school for the study, an English

immersion school in Japan. The English immersion school in Japan was selected as a natural treatment school for this research. The participants were all the first and second grade teachers at the immersion school (N=13). The rationale for choosing immersion school children as the research target is because of their unique school culture; Unlike regular international school where student population is quite diverse in terms of their nationality, immersion school student body generally consists of mostly Japanese children who are linguistically, culturally, and ethnically homogeneous. Therefore, previous intercultural experiences, which may confound findings, are naturally controlled.

At first, all the first and second grade teachers participated in the focus group interview which asked them to freely discuss their opinions on cultivating children's ICC in schooling at their immersion school. Because the researcher wanted to have some structure but leave leeway for free discussion, the study employed a semi-structured approach in which the researcher prepared the following three questions but let teachers spontaneously discuss as necessary; 1) What are the situations in which intercultural competence becomes visible? 2) What forms of intercultural behavior do the children exhibit? 3) What are the indicators for an "intercultural awareness" in children?

Second, the researcher shared the learning objectives for developing ICC suggested by Byram (see Appendix A) which reflect the elements of the above mentioned ICC model. The teachers were asked to evaluate each objective as "definitely achievable", "somewhat achievable", "difficult to achieve", or "impossible to achieve". The purpose of the pilot surveys was to investigate if the elements of Byram's ICC model would be agreed on by primary school teachers.

The data were analyzed in two stages. First, the focus group interview which was audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. In this stage, all field notes were transcribed as well. These field notes were used to enhance the insights provided by the transcripts.

Results

The questions and items from both the focus group interview and the pilot survey generally supported our pre-assumption about what elements comprise children's ICC. However, while the teachers agreed that many of the objectives in the attitude category are achievable for children, the objectives in knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness categories were mostly evaluated as "difficult to achieve" or "impossible to achieve". One teacher described his view on children's open mindedness which is a crucial attitudinal objective in the Byram's model as "For kids that age,

anything out of the ordinary can draw their attention and they love it.” Another teacher also commented in the similar manner on the children’s attitude towards unfamiliar things as “Kids find most things interesting if presented in the right way”. This view on children’s attitude was shared by most of the teachers.

On the other hands, many teachers pointed out that the objectives in Byram’s model for other three categories, especially “skills” and “critical cultural awareness”, would be difficult to achieve for their students. The following quote by a first grade teacher about the objectives for “skills of interpreting and relating” category illustrates this point and represents the views of many other teachers.

These concepts would be tough for my kids to even comprehend, as they generally have great difficulty identifying motives of others in almost all situations. Also, some objectives need a critical thinking skill, but most of them aren’t good at it yet at their age.

Similarly, many teachers evaluated the objectives in “knowledge” category as “difficult to achieve” or “impossible to achieve”. At the same time, however, quite a few teachers pointed out that more simple and basic knowledge such as geographical and linguistic knowledge which was not a part of Byram’s model could also be used as the indicators for ICC for young children.

Furthermore, when asked to give some general comments on the current research, quite a few teachers questioned the designing plan of the questionnaire. Those comments highlighted the needs for age-appropriate designs in terms of language of instruction and appearance of the questionnaires.

Discussion:

Operationalization of Byram’s ICC model

As described above, while the teachers agreed that many of the objectives in the attitude category are achievable for children, the objectives in skills, knowledge, and cultural awareness were evaluated as “difficult to achieve” or “impossible to achieve”. As some of the teachers as well as the previous studies pointed out, these concerns may be mainly due to the fact that young children of primary school age whose cognitive development is still not mature cannot fully support the knowledge and skills defined in the ICC model. These findings suggest that while Byram’s conceptual assumptions with regard to what elements consist of ICC have been agreed on by many other scholars, his definitions of these elements, skills, knowledge and cultural awareness in particular,

presuppose considerable capacity for the abstraction. As the previous literature suggests, this type of abstract concept is generally associated with attainment of specific stage of cognitive development. Therefore, though the literature supports that any subject including intercultural competence can be taught effectively to children at any stage of development (Byram & Doye, 1999; ELIAS, 2008), the preliminary findings of this research imply that fully applying the Byram's model to judge primary school children's ICC may not be appropriate, especially for children in the lower grades.

Designing the questionnaire

On the issues related to designing the actual measurement tool, based on the comments from the respondents, the researcher has decided to shift the original plan for self-report questionnaire to teacher-observational scale. This decision was based on the comments from the respondents about children's lack of critical thinking skills and objective understanding of the self and the others. With this shift, the researcher hopes that the reliability and validity of the prospective instrument will potentially increase while avoiding the complexity of multiple forms of the questionnaire for different grades. Additionally, the further reliability can be assured by cross-validating teachers' responses with parents' responses.

Conclusion:

There were two main issues found in the first step of the research project. The first issue was the operationalization of Byram's ICC model and its' objectives. The results of the focus group interview and the pilot survey revealed the needs for re-interpreting and rephrasing Byram's framework for practical use targeted for children. Thus, the next step is to develop the new scale that mainly focuses the attitudinal elements of the ICC model. In this step, it is also necessary to define observable indicators that are more age-appropriate for primary school children. The second issue was the highlighted need for better designing of the questionnaire that will be both age-appropriate and be able to maintain acceptable reliability and validity of responses. The next phase of the research has already started taking these issues into consideration. Once such valid scale becomes available, it will be used by teachers to monitor children's psychological development toward becoming a global citizen.

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Objective	1	2	3	4	NA
Knowledge					
1. Historical and contemporary relationship between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries					
2. The means of achieving contact with interlocutors from another country (at a distance or in proximity), of travel to and from, and the institutions which facilitate contact or help resolve problems					
3. The types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different culture origins					
4. The national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries					
5. The national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own country					
6. The national definitions of geographical space in one's own country, and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries					
7. The national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own.					
8. The processes and intuitions of socialization in one's own and one's interlocutor's country					
9. Social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's					
10. Institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's and interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them					
11. The processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country					
Skills of interpreting and relating					
1. Identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins					

Objective	1	2	3	4	NA
2. Identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present					
3. Mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena					
Skills of discovery and interaction					
1. Elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an exploratory system susceptible of application to other phenomena					
2. Identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations					
3. Identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances					
4. Use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country, culture and language and the extent of differences between one's own and the other					
5. Identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and society					
6. Identify and make use of public and private institutions which facilitate contact with other countries and cultures					
7. Use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture					
Critical cultural awareness					
1. Identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures					
2. make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria					

Objective	1	2	3	4	NA
3. Interact and mediate intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria , negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's knowledge , skills and attitudes					

要旨

児童の異文化理解能力測定テスト開発に関わる諸問題：

理論の適用可能性を中心として

竹内愛

初等教育における外国語教育導入に際して、異文化理解能力の習得が目標の一つとして声高に提唱されている一方で、現時点では児童の異文化理解能力を測定するテストが、日本語でも英語でも存在していない。本稿は、児童の異文化理解能力測定テスト開発を目的とする研究の途中経過として、現存する異文化理解能力モデルの適用可能性に関する諸問題を考察した。

本研究において、先行研究の精査と小学校教員を対象とした聞き取り及び質問紙調査の結果明らかになった、テスト開発に際しての問題点は以下の通りである。(1) 成人の異文化理解能力に関する理論や尺度を、児童の心理特性を測定する際に適用することは不適切である。具体的には、既存の異文化理解能力モデルの「態度」項目は児童においても測定可能であるが、「知識」項目や「比較解釈するスキル」項目を、児童を対象とした測定テスト開発にそのまま適応することは避けるべきである。(2) テスト自体の信頼性および再現性に関しては、児童の認知能力や客観性の欠如といった観点から、児童本人に測定テストを受けさせることは妥当ではない。

上記の考察より、既存の異文化理解能力モデルを基に、児童の異文化理解能力測定に特化した質問項目を抽出し直し、加筆修正を行う必要性が明らかになった。また、再現性や妥当性という実用上の問題点が明確になったことより、当初の研究案であった児童を回答者とするテストではなく、教員を回答者として児童個々人の異文化理解能力を観察評価させる形式に、大きく方向転換をすることとなった。